



# BLM - ALASKA FRONTIERS

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## BLM names new managers for Northern Alaska

BLM Alaska State Director Tom Allen named two new managers for the Northern Field Office in Fairbanks, Robert W. Schneider as the new field manager and William A. Freeland as the new associate field manager.

Schneider, 52, will be transferring from Craig, Colorado, where he has been associate field manager since 1994. Schneider has a strong background in outdoor recreation with experience in the BLM Washington Office Division of Recreation, Cultural and Wilderness Resources where he helped implement BLM's national Recreation 2000 program. He has also worked in recreation and resource management at several BLM offices in California.

Freeland is an environmental field coordinator with the Department of Energy at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. A certified wildlife biologist and registered environmental manager, he has 24 years of federal experience in western states. Former jobs were with the Bonneville Power Administration, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the USDA Soil Conservation Service.

The new managers plan to visit Fairbanks sometime in November, and will report after the first of the year.

## Kids tour Science Center on Public Lands Day



Patricia Bieber

Youngsters meet Casey the Beaver of the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau during the annual open house at the Campbell Creek Science Center. ACVB was one of 24 local participants and sponsors at the September 26 event which celebrated National Public Lands Day at the Campbell Tract.

# Horsing around on the last frontier

The Wild Horse and Burro Program is one of BLM's most popular and well known programs nationally, but few people ever take advantage of it in Alaska.

First, it's incredibly expensive to care for these animals in Alaska, far more than outside the state (see Adoption Costs). Second, and perhaps more importantly, the BLM, the federal agency which administers the national program, doesn't have horses or burros available for adoption in Alaska.

Paula Krebs, BLM's wild horse and burro contact in Alaska, explains: "I usually get one call a week from people wanting wild horses. As soon as I tell them they'll have to bring the horse up from the lower 48, . . . that usually ends the conversation."

The few people who adopt horses usually make the trip and bring the animal back in a horse trailer. Only one or two horses are adopted

each year in Alaska. These Alaskan wild horse enthusiasts feel the advantages of the program outweigh the hard work and costs.

Krebs says one of the most successful adoptions occurred several years ago when a Bettles man adopted two mares and two foals. "We thought they'd end up as bear bait," chuckles Krebs. The man had other things in mind. "He wanted to teach his children responsibility and it worked," says Krebs. "The kids dearly loved the animals and their care of the horses so impressed their father that he says he'd like to get more horses."

Candy Drayton had the same thing in mind when she adopted Emily, a three-year old mare, in July 1998 for her thirteen-year-old daughter. However, the care and training of the horse is a family endeavor. In the evenings, Drayton and her four children are usually at the Elmendorf Air Force Base stables in Anchorage where Emily is housed. Emily, a black horse with a white star on her forehead is Drayton's black beauty. "She's the sweetest thing, so intelligent. . . the sweetest personality," gushes Drayton. The horse is easily frightened, but affectionate toward Drayton and her children, often nudging them for food. She eats out of their hands but refuses typical horse treats such as apples and carrots. She prefers timothy hay.

"It takes a lot of responsibility before you get to the enjoyment," Drayton says. She works with the animal every day and her costs are \$3,500 so far. It's time consuming but she thinks its worth it. Drayton says the people from BLM have been "beautiful." Drayton knew about BLM's wild horse and burro program when she was younger and was surprised it still existed.

Drayton worked almost exclusively with a California BLM wild horse and burro specialist who walked her through the adoption process. Drayton explained what she wanted with respect to size and temperament. When she showed up at the adoption center, she had two horses to choose from, Emily and another equally beautiful but more spirited animal. She chose Emily.

"It's been a truly pleasurable experience. As soon as she's trained, I'll go down the highway and get another. I think I want to get a burro next," says Drayton.

The only down side has been the prejudice she's encountered from other horse owners.



Danielle Allen

Candy Drayton acquired Emily, a three-year-old mare, from BLM's wild horse and burro program. Drayton and her children work with Emily at the Elmendorf Air Force stables (Anchorage) where the wild horse is kept.

Many horse owners think because her horse isn't a thoroughbred, it doesn't belong at the stables. Drayton chalks it up to ignorance and says she also ignores the comments about her horse being unsafe. She says her children are always supervised when handling the horse and Emily's ground training is proceeding just fine.

Clinton Hanson, a BLM manager at the Anchorage Field Office, inspected Emily's facilities, and is not surprised by Drayton's enthusiasm. Emily has gone through a gentling program conducted by California prison inmates.

Hanson says he and Jeff Denton, a wildlife biologist from the Anchorage Field Office, conduct site inspection of facilities for potential adopters within the Anchorage area. They worked with the program in the Lower 48. Hanson, a former area manager in Rock Springs, says he's been involved with wild horse management and roundups that over the years involved thousands of animals. For those interested in the program, he recommends reading BLM's brochure about the Adoption of Wild Horses and Burros.

Candy Drayton adds, "If more people knew about this wonderful program, (BLM) would have no problem placing the animals they now have."

— Danielle Allen

## Iditarod Trail Council schedules final meeting

The Iditarod National Historic Trail (NHT) Advisory Council will hold its final meeting November 10 at the Campbell Creek Science Center in Anchorage. The 12-member council was authorized in 1978 when Congress amended the National Trails System Act of 1968 to include the Iditarod as a national historic trail. The council sunsets this year as a federal advisory council and will open a new chapter as a non-profit organization known as Iditarod NHT, Inc.

Trail coordinator Mike Zaidlicz explains: "The new organization will work with public and private landowners along the trail system on various trail improvement and maintenance projects. But as a non-profit, Iditarod NHT, Inc. can pursue private funding sources to supplement government funds in maintaining the trail system."

## Horse savvy

**Wild Horse and Burro Program:** BLM offers more than 6,000 wild horses and burros for adoption to the public annually. Wild horses and burros are unbranded, unclaimed, free-roaming animals found on BLM or Forest Service administered land. These animals are removed from range lands for the protection of the animals and the range. Since 1973 BLM has placed 148,000 animals through the program.

**How does it work?** The potential adopter should contact the national BLM wild horse and burro program at 800-417-9647. A wild horse specialist will help you through the process providing the necessary information and paperwork. If you have access to the Internet, you can apply electronically by visiting <http://www.adoptahorse.blm.gov>. Pictures of the animals are available for viewing.

**Who can adopt?** Any person 18 years or older. Individuals can't have convictions for animal abuse, must have proper facilities, and can't already possess four untitled animals. Parents may acquire horses for children.

**Where are the horses?** BLM maintains adoption centers throughout the U.S. Many are located in the western U.S. close to where many of the animals have been captured. An adoption schedule is available stating where and when animals are available. There are no adoption centers in Alaska.

**Adoption costs:** Wild horses and burros typically cost \$125 each. However, different BLM facilities have different requirements. Just recently a competitive bid process was introduced on the Internet at some sites while other sites have a lottery system. In addition, adopters will incur expenses for things such as the stall or corral, medicine, training, salt, grooming supplies, feed, veterinary care, worming, shoeing, tack, and insecticides. In the Lower 48 these costs are approximately \$300 - \$1,000 annually. Costs in Alaska are considerably more and may average \$500 per month.

**The animals:** Wild horses are typically 14-15 hands or 56-60" tall, weigh 900 - 1,100 pounds, and can be several months to nine years old. Most are five years or younger. Burros are about 11 hands or 44" tall. They are usually gray, but may also be brown or black.

**Ownership:** If the potential adopter meets certain requirements after one year, BLM will issue a certificate of title. An equine clearance is needed by the potential adopter when transporting animals across the Canadian/U.S. border.

# A tale of two cleanups

*When one asks what is involved in keeping public lands clean, a typical answer might involve a campsite free from litter or picking up trash along the side of a highway. But BLM does all that and more as these two related articles illustrate.*

## Chapter 1: Sagwon Airfield

Near an abandoned gravel airfield on the treeless Arctic Coastal Plain of Northern Alaska, two young bull muskoxen squared off. Heads lowered, they jostled each other for dominance over a pile of hardened earth. After a half hour of pushing and shoving, they gave up the struggle and ambled companionably toward the Sagavanirktok River.

"That is a major reason our company decided to help BLM with this cleanup project," said Leslie Griffiths, British Petroleum's Sagwon Cleanup Project Manager. "Hundreds of deteriorating containers of drilling muds were stored in this area probably 20-30 years ago. The boxes rotted from the weather, the muds spilled and the muskoxen of the area were drawn to the salts in some of the muds. Unfortunately, they also contain barium and chromium, so we needed to remove them to protect the animals."

The Sagwon Airfield, built around 1962, was the eastern hub of the 1960s oil and gas exploration boom. The airfield was operated by Alaska Interior Airline, which became MarkAir, and was abandoned during the 1970s.

The distinctive Sagwon Bluffs loom in the background of the airfield. They follow the curve of the Sagavanirktok (Sag) River, providing habitat for raptors such as peregrines and gyrfalcons. The 2,500-acre cleanup site is approximately 65 miles south of Prudhoe Bay on the north side of the Brooks Range. There is no road access, which makes removal of the buildings, equipment and barrels more difficult and expensive.

BLM approached BP (Alaska), Inc. about helping with the cleanup in 1992. In 1993 BLM sent a letter to companies who may have used the airfield asking if they would help with the cleanup. Only BP, ARCO and Alyeska volunteered. Although they had not been involved in Sagwon, they recognized that the oil industry in general had contributed to the accumulation of solid waste at the site during early oil and gas exploration. In a good faith gesture, BP assumed the lead on the cleanup and contacted other oil companies, the State of Alaska and BLM for support. BP-Alaska had already cleaned up three similar sites around the state.

Sagwon Airfield lands have been selected by the State of Alaska since 1992, when all the



Sharon Wilson

Department of Interior visitors tour Sagwon Airfield cleanup project. Front row, left to right: Jody Kusek, Director of Planning and Performance Management; Sylvia Baca, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals; and Kim Harb, Special Assistant, Minerals, Realty and Resource Protection, listen to Leslie Griffiths, BP environmental scientist, describe the cleanup operation.



surrounding lands were conveyed to help fulfill the state's entitlement. The state requires certification of cleanup of the airfield prior to accepting conveyance of this site. Including the airstrip, approximately 30 acres of the abandoned site will be restored.

In 1996 Alyeska received reports of caribou and muskoxen using the drilling muds as a salt lick. The company packed the spilled drilling muds into containment boxes and readied them for shipping. Pallet loads of boxes will be taken out this winter over frozen ground.

BP-Exploration (Alaska) is leading the cleanup project, partnering with BLM and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, ARCO and Alyeska, and the State of Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Lands and Division of Fish and Wildlife. Unocal and Phillips Petroleum are also contributing to the cleanup effort. Cost of this cleanup is expected to exceed \$3 million.

During Phase 1 of the cleanup, initiated in August 1998, abandoned 55-gallon drums were containerized and characterized, potentially hazardous materials in buildings were sampled, and debris requiring off-site removal was inventoried. To prevent damage to the tundra while retrieving thousands of abandoned 55-gallon drums scattered over the area, a fire crew and a helicopter manager from BLM's Alaska Fire Service slung-load the drums from the tundra to the gravel pad at the airfield. BLM also provided air logistical support for BP and its contracted staff, as well as flying BLM and state oversight personnel to the site.

## Chapter 2: Red Top

BLM has completed cleanup operations at the former Red Top retort site on the north bank of the Wood River near Aleknagik.

The Red Top retort site was active from 1952 through 1955 in conjunction with a nearby mercury mine. Mineral cinnabar was mined from Marsh Mountain, transported down slope to the Wood River, and retorted to extract mercury. BLM was notified of potential hazards at the retort site in 1992.

BLM hired an independent hazardous materials contractor to assess the site in 1994, and subsequently removed 180 cubic yards of mercury contaminated soil and 30 cubic yards of



A backhoe excavates stockpiled soil contaminated with fuel oil at the Red Top site near Aleknagik. The materials were loaded onto a barge for transporting to a licensed disposal facility.

soil contaminated by fuel oil. These materials were containerized and secured on site in a fenced area while BLM pursued long-term cleanup options and funding.

BLM environmental protection specialist Mike Alcorn worked with the hazardous materials contractor on the Red Top cleanup operation. "This summer an additional nine cubic yards of soil was removed based on previous sampling results, and additional site soil, water and sediment samples were taken for analysis," Alcorn explained.

In September the contractor removed the containers and associated debris from the site and barged the materials to Dillingham, where they were transferred to a commercial barge departing for Seattle in early October. Alcorn said once the materials reach Seattle, they will be segregated into solid or hazardous waste and sent to licensed treatment and disposal facilities.

The site was graded and seeded in late September following removal of the materials. The contractual cost for the 1998 cleanup operation is estimated at \$575,000.

BLM's Anchorage Field Manager Nick Douglas acknowledges the Red Top cleanup was a complex project. "BLM employees did a superior job under difficult circumstances and abbreviated time frames. The village of Aleknagik was very patient during the entire process, and we greatly appreciate their support."

# Only one major Alaska fire for 1998

**IN THE  
NEXT  
ISSUE:  
Who pays  
the bills  
once the  
fire is out.**

A low pressure system jutting up from the Aleutian Islands, which normally weakens during the summer months, persisted during the 1998 wildfire season and caused a low fire year.

"The low in the Bering Sea brought winds from the southwest, which is a wet pattern for us," said Sharon Alden, fire weather forecaster with the National Weather Service in Fairbanks. "There were no extended warm, dry periods. The pattern is more typical of fall weather."

The season saw one major fire, the Carla Lake Fire near Delta Junction. That fire burned 53,720 acres and cost more than \$10 million to control. It became a Type I incident, requiring the deployment of Alaska's Type I Incident Management Team, after winds pushed the fire off the Fort Greely military reservation and toward several residential areas. The lightning-caused fire began May 21 and was not declared out until Sept. 16.

Alden said the unusual weather pattern also favored chinooking of winds across the Alaska Range. The winds become warm and dry as they drop down from the mountains, and funnel through the Delta area at 50 mph or more.

All in all, 421 fires were reported to the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC). A total of 176,000 acres were burned, including 55,284 acres in 11 prescribed fires.

Don Barry, intelligence officer with the AICC, said 364 wildfires were human-caused, burning 1,410 acres. Forty-five fires were lightning-caused, burning 119,367 acres. Only 15 fires were more than 100 acres and five were more than 1,000 acres.

While Alaska experienced a slow fire year, some areas of the Lower 48 suffered extreme fire conditions. The AICC responded by sending 280 individuals and four 20-person fire crews. Support personnel were assigned primarily to Florida and Texas. The crews were assigned to fires in the western states. In late September the Chena Hot Shot Crew was ordered to Puerto Rico to help with disaster relief efforts from Hurricane Georges.

— Andy Williams



Smoke plumes fill the air during the Carla Lake Fire which burned more than 53,000 acres this summer near Delta Junction, Alaska.

**POWERLINE DECISION REACHED FOR GOLDEN VALLEY**—BLM issued its final Record of Decision for the Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA) right-of-way between Healy and Fairbanks. The decision, signed September 14, selects the Rex-South Route, the preferred alternative in the final environmental impact statement released in June.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, which manages the majority of the lands affected by the project, also selected the Rex-South Route as its preferred route.

This route will help the Fairbanks area meet its energy needs by providing a second path for power from Healy and Southcentral Alaska generation sources. The route will save consumers about \$30 million over other routes.

Fourteen public meetings (including formal hearings) were held in Fairbanks, Nenana, Anderson and Healy, the communities directly affected by the right-of-way.

**BLM DISTRIBUTES \$8 MILLION**—Alaska received \$8,064,394 under the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Act of 1976. BLM distributes the payments to eligible units of local governments each year. The payments are intended to offset the loss of tax revenue to states and localities caused by the presence of tax-exempt federal lands.

"PILT payments help local governments provide such vital services as firefighting and police protection; construction of public schools and roads; and search-and-rescue operations," said BLM Director Pat Shea. "These payments are one of the ways the federal government can fulfill its role of being a good neighbor to local communities. This is an especially important role for BLM, which manages more public land than any other federal agency."

**BLM STATE DIRECTOR ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT** — BLM Alaska State Director Tom Allen surprised his employees by announcing his plans to retire. He and his wife Carol will leave Alaska and build a home outside Elko, Nevada, within view of the Ruby Mountains. "Employees here are getting the job done. It's difficult to leave Alaska, but after 36 years of government service, I'm ready for a change," he said. Tom and Carol plan to move sometime this winter but no date has been set.

*Errata: In the July/August issue, we reported that the little brown bat is the only bat found in Alaska. This statement is incorrect. The little brown bat is the only bat found in the Anchorage area; there are several other types of bats found throughout Alaska, notably in southeast portions of the state.*



Teresa McPherson

**LEAF LESSONS**—Sylvia Baca, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals at the Department of Interior, helps a fifth-grade student identify leaf specimens at the Campbell Creek Science Center in Anchorage as teacher Martha Gould-Lehe and center director Deb Greene look on. Students from Kasuun Elementary School attend educational events at the center throughout the school year under a partnership agreement with BLM's Anchorage Field Office. Baca was in Alaska in early September and took time from her busy schedule of visiting the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, Prudhoe Bay, and the Trans Alaska Pipeline to join students at the center for a morning of science activities.





# Gulkana River planning begins

BLM has awarded a contract to TGM Planning and Ecosystem Management International, Inc. (a joint venture) of Colorado to conduct a planning process for the Gulkana River.

BLM manages the Gulkana National Wild River corridor from the outlet of Paxson Lake to the confluence of the Sourdough Creek, including the Middle Fork and West Fork. The State of Alaska and Ahtna, Inc., the Native regional corporation, are cooperating with BLM so that the lower Gulkana, to its confluence with the Copper River, will be included in the study area.

"We appreciate the participation of the State and Ahtna, Inc. in the planning process," says BLM State Director Tom Allen. "With their help we can plan for the management of visitor use and natural resource issues affecting the Gulkana River system."

The public is invited to attend workshops during the month of October where information on the planning process will be presented and public concerns will be addressed. The workshops will be conducted in Glennallen at the Caribou Cafe on Oct. 19; Fairbanks at the Noel Wien Public Library, 1215

Crowles Street on Oct. 21; Anchorage at the Loussac Public Library conference room at 3600 Denali St. on Oct. 23. Three workshop sessions will be held at 2 pm, 4:30 pm and 7 pm at each location.

To provide consistency in the planning process, there will be a moratorium on new commercial guiding operations occurring within the BLM-managed Gulkana National Wild River corridor. Guides authorized to operate on the Gulkana NWR during at least one summer season between 1995 and

1998 will be eligible to continue operations at historic levels. Guides operating on the lower Gulkana will be unaffected by the moratorium. The moratorium is expected to last three years, the estimated length of the planning process.

For further information, contact Kathy Liska at the Glennallen Field Office, P.O. Box 147, Glennallen, AK 99588 or (907) 822-3217. To be added to the planning project mailing list, contact TGM at (970) 247-0757 or by writing P.O. Box 2372, Durango, CO 81302.



Workshops open to the public during October give citizens a voice in determining what the Gulkana River will look like in the future.

Editor: Edward Bovy

Graphics/Photos:

Jerry Kouzes

Dwayne Richardson

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